

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE
FRUIT AND VEGETABLE PROGRAMS
PROCESSED PRODUCTS BRANCH

NOTICE TO THE TRADE

SUBJECT: AVAILABILITY OF COLOR STANDARDS FOR HONEY

The Processed Products Branch (PPB), Fruit and Vegetable Programs of the U.S. Department of Agriculture hereby notifies the food industry and other interested parties of the availability of the newly issued color comparator for classifying color on the basis of the United States Standards for Grades of Extracted Honey. The honey color comparator with color standards and empty sample bottles are commercially available from:

Gretag Macbeth, Munsell Color
617 Little Britain Road
New Windsor, NY 12553-6148
Tel.: (800) 622-2384 or (914) 565-7660, Fax: (914) 561-0267

The honey color standards consist of six color standards (comprised of six translucent plastic tiles) and two metal comparator boxes measuring approximately 11 x 2³/₄ x 1⁷/₈ inches divided into five equal compartments, each having two viewing apertures approximately 1³/₁₆ inch square. The new comparator, dated September 26, 2003, replaces the smaller previously distributed version. The three lighter color standards are mounted in the comparator box labeled Water White, Extra White, and White in compartments 1, 3, and 5. The three darker standards are mounted in a similar manner in the second comparator box labeled Extra Light Amber, Light Amber, and Amber. The bottle containing the sample of honey is placed in the appropriate comparator in compartment 2 or 4 so that it will be between adjacent color standards. Three square bottles similar to the sample bottles filled with distilled water and referred to as "blanks", are placed in the compartments behind the color standards.

To assist in the color classification of honey samples which are appreciably turbid, three bottles containing suspensions of bentonite in distilled water having varying degrees of turbidity are used. These are used interchangeably with any one of the clear blanks to reduce the brightness of the color standard to a level near that of the honey to be classified. Instructions for making up the cloudy suspensions are found in the grading manual for Extracted Honey.

The following procedure is used in classifying the color of extracted honey with these color comparators:

(1) The clear blanks or the cloudy suspensions are placed behind the plastic standards in compartments 1, 3, and 5 of one or both of the comparators.

(2) The sample of honey to be classified, which must be free of granulation, is poured into a clean dry bottle. The bottle is then placed in compartment 2 or 4 of either comparator box.

(3) The comparator is held at a convenient distance from the eye and viewed using an approved light source. The color classification of the honey is then determined by comparison of the sample with the standards. Switching the sample from compartment 2 to 4, or vice versa; interchanging the clear blanks and the appropriate cloudy suspension, and in some cases shifting to the second comparator or using both comparators, may be necessary.

If the sample is equal to the Water White color standard or lighter in color, the color is classified as Water White. If darker in color than the Water White color standard, but not darker than the Extra White color standard the color is classified as Extra White, and so on.

Many types of honey are appreciably cloudy because of the presence of air bubbles and fine suspended matter. In such cases, the brightness of the sample will be lowered and its color classification may be difficult to determine, particularly if its hue is close to one of the color standards. When this is the case, the color classifications will be more easily determined if the clear blank is replaced by one of the cloudy suspensions. Although these cloudy suspensions are designed as aids in the classification of the color of honey, they may also serve as aids in evaluating the factor of clarity in ascertaining the grade of the product.

The color standards can be cleaned with a non-abrasive cotton cloth to avoid damage to the plastic material.

For more information on the use of these color standards, please contact:

Chief, Processed Products Branch
STOP 0247, 1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250
Telephone: (202) 720-5021 or
fax: (202) 690-1527

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Date